I've been asked to house sit for a friend of a friend. Because I'm sick of my own I agree. It's a beautiful house, and the owners are visibly well-to-do and houseproud. I am possessed by an uncharacteristic sense of duty; there are a few things they've missed.

I notice the drawer that holds pots, pans and cake tins sticks. I take everything out and rearrange it neatly, then I watch it close, tiny wheels rolling along the runners, with a silent cry of delight.

The fiddle fig is dying. The plant is obviously prized, standing at nearly ceiling height and in a very large and expensive pot but its leaves are going brown at the edges I see. My mother, the gardener, tells me to lop it to bits. 'Cut it all back' she tells me over the phone. I take it too far immediately.

'Now the fiddle is a stick,' she says, 'Hahaha!' That woman has no fear of death.

I prepare my lies. I decide it should be a situation in which my own well-being was in jeopardy.

Branches lost in an altercation with a burglar where the plant was the only available weapon, and

I—bravely warding him off! For surely no one could argue with that? No one, no matter how houseproud, would place the plant above the one who waters it.

I eye the stump wearily, unsure.

[Door slams]
Gilles Jacot & Paul Niedermayer
8.06–5.07.2024
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